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## Hospitalman John E. Kilmer Remembered

Filed under CORPSMAN, FLEET AND THE FLEET MARINE FORCE, MILITARY MEDICINE

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**By Larry Coffey, Navy Medicine Education and Training Command public affairs officer**



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Kilmer was awarded the Medal of Honor

As the Navy Medicine Education and Training Command public affairs officer and a retired Navy journalist, I cover a plethora of Navy events in the San Antonio area.


This past summer I attended a graveside memorial service just outside San Antonio honoring Medal of Honor Recipient Hospitalman John E. Kilmer. The service has become an annual event where Hospital Corps “A” School instructors, staff and students from the Navy Medicine Training Support Center (NMTSC) join members of several local veterans’ organizations at Kilmer’s grave to provide honors. The ceremony is held on the anniversary of his death in 1952. He died from wounds sustained during the attack on “Bunker

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Honor posthumously for using his body to shield another man from enemy fire.

Hill” in Korea. Kilmer was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously for using his body to shield another man from enemy fire.

HMC Melissa Foster, NMTSC command master chief, while speaking at the service described seeing Kilmer’s photo on the Medal of Honor memorial walls located at virtually every hospital, clinic and Navy Medicine facility around the world. She said his photo stood out to her because he was so young and because of the way he wore his cover, pushed back on his head. In a note she wrote to me she said, “HN Kilmer’s picture has graced the bulkhead of every MTF I have been associated with throughout my career. As a corpsman I remember reading his Medal of Honor citation and thinking how he was so selfless and honorable at such a young age. The memorial this year was inspiring and was attended by veterans from most major conflicts, chief petty officer selectees and NMTSC student choir. It was an opportunity of a lifetime for all of us, especially for our future corpsmen.”

I agree with the master chief – the ceremony was moving. But, I was touched more by what she wrote, and from notes I later received from the NMTSC CPO mess members and those selected to join the mess.

HMC (Sel) Scott Lyons, a BMTCP instructor and NMTSC Sailor of the Year, wrote, “The memorial ceremony for ‘Jacky’ Kilmer was an amazing experience. It was very humbling. I love being around veterans. Their stories and experiences are also amazing. The ceremony itself was awesome. It wasn’t big or flashy. It was just veterans, families and active-duty people bonded by a similar experience and their love for the country. Having the student choir there was a great decision. It is important for our young, future corpsman to share in the heritage and learn of the sacrifices of those who have gone before them. Hopefully, we can arrange for more students and young Corpsmen to attend.”



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HMC Jodie Coffin, a Basic Medical Technician Corpsman Program (BMTCP) instructor and team LCPO, wrote, “The HN John E. Kilmer event to me has always been a touching moment. Having an opportunity to pay homage to a corpsman hero is a great privilege. He is not buried in a national cemetery where other heroes lie, but within his family plot in a small town. CPOs take great pride in keeping traditions alive and maintaining a sense of heritage within those we are entrusted to lead. We give our time and respects to honor him so he is not forgotten. It is especially great to be part of celebrating HN Kilmer’s sacrifice

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because San Antonio is the cradle of the

Hospital Corps. Nearly 90% of the NMTSC staff directly develops Sailors by molding them into corpsmen. We say ‘celebrating’ his sacrifice because he embodies exactly what we stand for: rendering care to others before self. You see, I believe Kilmer not only enjoyed doing his job. He did it well. Kilmer’s biography re-energizes corpsmen young and old, and it is just awesome to be able to pay tribute to such an amazing hero.” During the ceremony HMC (Sel) Cynethia Marsh read Kilmer’s biography. She also wrote, “Being a part of the memorial honoring HN John E. Kilmer made me feel a greater sense of pride and dignity. I was so nervous in the beginning of the ceremony because I wanted to read his biography with justice. Afterwards, I was thankful that Chief Coffin gave me the opportunity to pay tribute to one of our heroes. I love giving back in any way I can. I feel a great sense of purpose whenever I can do for others.”

HMC (Sel) Aaron Ward wrote, “I knew little of John Kilmer except of his photo when I was asked to attend a service honoring his passing. I was not overly moved in one direction or another. Still, I will not let an opportunity go by to celebrate those who have gone before when given the chance. At the ceremony, I felt humbled by the veteran men and women around me who had gone into harm’s way to defend freedom and democracy around the world. We spoke briefly of my wars and theirs, changes in the military services and things that remain the same. As the service began, I experienced a deep feeling of pride beyond measure. A corpsman, John E. Kilmer, was remembered this day, and hearing his actions resonated deep within me. I was proud and happy to have been able to be a part of this man’s legacy – as a service member, as a Sailor, and as a corpsman. Thank you John Kilmer, from a brother of the Hospital Corps.”



The ceremony is held on the anniversary of his death in 1952. He died from wounds sustained during the attack on “Bunker Hill” in Korea.

And to all corpsmen and fellow chief petty officers, this old, retired senior chief says thank you.

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